REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON STRATEGIC FORCES

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Statement by Harold Brown on the Report of the Presidential Commission on Strategic Forces

The purpose of U.S. strategic nuclear forces is deterrence of attack against the United States or our allies. The consequences of nuclear war would be so unprecedentedly catastrophic that deterrence must be unchallengeable. To sustain deterrence the United States needs to show its clear commitment to do what is necessary to maintain and modernize its nuclear forces, and to demonstrate the political will to bear the costs whether political or economic.

Today, the United States confronts a situation in which our intercontinental ballistic missiles are vulnerable to a Soviet ICBM attack and are substantially less capable than the Soviet ICBM force in terms of the combination of accuracy and payload. The question is how to proceed to reinforce deterrence given that deterrence depends on the Soviet leaders being certain that they could not expect to gain from the use, or threatened use, of their nuclear forces. They must be in no doubt at all that whatever kind of nuclear attack they might launch, the U.S. response would leave them worse off. To meet this objective, it is important for U.S. nuclear forces to be able to threaten retaliation against the assets that the Soviet leaders appear to prize--their urban-industrial society, their nuclear and conventional military forces, the hardened shelters that protect their political and military control centers as well as their own lives.

The modernization of the U.S. ICBM force is critical to this task of maintaining deterrence. I, therefore, support the recommendations on ICBM modernization made by the Presidential Commission on Strategic Forces. They propose the deployment of a limited number of MX in hardened Minuteman silos and the design and development of a new smaller single-warhead missile. Those proposals deserve bipartisan support even though they are not ideal and do not provide an immediate solution to the problem of ICBM vulnerability.

The Commission's recommendations deserve support as well for another important reason. A U.S. commitment to strategic nuclear force modernization is an essential part of our negotiating leverage in START. In this regard, I believe the United States should affirm its support for the SALT II and ABM treaties and proceed to negotiate seriously for further reductions in the overall levels of strategic nuclear forces. In particular, the United States should seek reductions in the number of warheads per ICBM--ideally to one per missile.

ICBM Modernization

The reasons why we need to maintain ICBMs are the same as those that led us in the past to deploy the Minuteman force and to improve its capabilities--in payload, accuracy, and the hardening of its silos. Having a Triad of strategic nuclear forces complicates Soviet nuclear planning. They would have to find separate counters to each part of the U.S. retaliatory force. They face conflicting requirements in timing simultaneous attacks against U.S. bomber bases and ICBMs.

The vulnerabilities and capabilities of U.S. strategic forces need to be viewed for the force as a whole. With force diversity, the United States faces less risk if the survivability of one part of the force begins to erode. The existing force of bombers and cruise missiles, and our submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), now insure us against the vulnerabilities of our ICBMs. We need to shore up U.S. ICBM (and airbreathing) forces to insure against the possibility that in future decades Soviet anti-submarine capabilities may begin to threaten SLBMs.

ICBMs also have good communications, command and control, and retargetting capability. Because of their accuracy, they are the most effective way of placing at risk many of the targets which the Soviet leaders value most.

For these reasons, the United States needs to maintain and modernize its land-based ICBM force. The following criteria need to be used in designing such a force.

--It should have a capability to threaten the full range of Soviet targets, including time-urgent hardened targets. This capability to attack hard targets need not match that of the Soviet Union but it needs to be greater than it is today.

--It should be as survivable as possible against a preemptive Soviet attack.

--It should be consistent with the goals of strategic arms control and reduction and, if possible, it should improve the chances of achieving them.

On balance, I conclude that the best available way of pursuing these objectives for the long run is through development of a small single-warhead ICBM, to be deployed in hard silos and/or in hardened mobile launchers on military bases. As recommended by the Commission, we should proceed now to engineering design and plan for full-scale development within three years. But this new system still has many uncertainties, particularly in terms of cost and of the feasibility of hardening truck mobile missiles or super-hardening fixed shelters. For example, unless the United States can negotiate severe limits on the level of ICBM warheads, the number of single warhead missiles needed for a force of reasonable capability and survivability could make the system costs, and the amount of land required, prohibitably great. We also do not know whether truck-mobile missiles will be able to survive a megaton blast two miles away. Lacking that hardness, the mobile system is easily barraged into destruction or forced into peacetime deployment on highways, which would raise political difficulties.

Because of both these uncertainties and the need for the United States to respond at last to the major Soviet ICBM modernization program, the United States also should deploy a limited number of MX missiles (100) in Minuteman silos, hardened to whatever degree is cost effective.

The Commission's recommendations will not eliminate immediately the narrow but significant vulnerability of U.S. ICBMs to Soviet ICBM attack. But the MX deployment would end the asymmetry of the Soviets now being able to threaten all U.S. land-based ICBMs while the United States has no corresponding ongoing deployment that might, by a future expansion, ultimately threaten all Soviet ICBMs. The parallel single warhead ICBM

program would offer a prospect of mutually reduced ICBM vulnerability if the Soviets are brought through an MX deployment program to move away from large fixed MIRVed ICBMs, either by negotiation or by their own concern about the vulnerability of their ICBMs.

Neither part of this program is a satisfactory answer by itself. The single-warhead ICBM is too far from deployment and raises many uncertainties. Putting MX into existing silos does not solve the problem of ICBM vulnerability. But the other available alternatives suffer from even more serious defects.

Deploying MX in multiple protective shelters would be technically preferable. Deployment in superhardened shelters at some appropriate spacing and with a more modest degree of deceptive basing would probably be workably effective. But neither is politically feasible.

As an alternative to putting MX in silos, the United States could now begin a development program to retrofit an improved guidance system into the Minuteman III missiles or to put a suitably modified version of the D-5 (Trident II) missile, now under development, into Minuteman silos. Both would take several years longer to deploy than MX. Neither would be as capable in terms of payload and accuracy. Though the costs of developing, flight testing, and retrofitting improved guidance in Minuteman II would be somewhat less, Minuteman missiles are no longer in production. Thus, the Soviets would probably have little incentive to negotiate downward their current capabilities in ICBMs so as to avoid U.S. actions that would increase the vulnerability of the Soviet ICBM force. And to deploy an

equal total payload of D-5 missiles would in fact cost more than to deploy MX.

The most serious problem with these two alternatives is, however, that--as a practical matter--if the United States does not deploy MX, it is unlikely that it will deploy either a new guidance system for Minuteman III or the D-5 in Minuteman silos. Recall that we said in the early 1970s that we would modernize with a new missile in the late 1970s. In the mid-1970s we said that we would do so in the early 1980s, and in the late 1970s that we would in the mid-1980s. We have failed so far to do any of those things, even while the Soviets were deploying over 600 new ICBMs, each with a payload equal to or greater than that of MX, and with accuracies now matching those of the most accurate U.S. ICBMs.

To say that the United States will modernize in the early 1990s with a small single-warhead missile will just not be believable. The Soviets would be justified in calculating that any new U.S. ICBM system will be aborted by some combination of environmental, doctrinal, fiscal, and political problems. Our allies in Europe might balk at deploying new U.S. intermediate range missiles on their territory.

Conclusion

I believe the Commission's recommendations provide a reasonable program, and on balance the best available one, for the modernization of the U.S. ICBM force. They deserve bipartisan support.

--The United States needs to promote deterrence by demonstrating to the Soviet Union and our allies that we will maintain a modernized strategic nuclear force essentially equivalent to that of the Soviet Union.

--We need to deploy a modernized ICBM force given the major modernization of the Soviet ICBM force. We cannot afford militarily or politically to abandon unilaterally our ICBMS.

--We must also find ways to make our ICBMs more survivable and, therefore, should begin another path of ICBM development, the new small single-warhead missile, while continuing to work on further hardening of silos for possible use with any future ICBM deployments.

--We must firmly demonstrate our commitment to arms control as a critical complement to strategic nuclear force modernization. Specifically, we should make a proposal in START for further limits on the modern land-based MIRVed ICBMs of both sides.

I make this recommendation while continuing to differ with this Administration on some other parts of its strategic nuclear force program (such as the B-1)--as well as on other issues of national security policy--and with an appreciation that more politically astute decisions in the past could well have produced a better solution.

But there is plenty of responsibility to go round on that score, reaching back into the early 1970s. We need now to rebuild a political consensus in the U.S. about the purpose and nature of our strategic deterrent forces. During the past four years, we have experienced negative consensus on this matter. Opposition to SALT II and opposition to strategic force modernization combined to prevent (with considerable help from Soviet actions) ratification of the former and to inhibit the latter. Consensus now needs to be built by addition, not by subtraction. I urge that those who support a single-warhead missile as the correct long term direction for land-based ICBMs join those who support a limited deployment of MX missiles to settle upon such a modernization program, and to stick with it. I also urge that those devoted to strategic arms control and reduction, and those devoted to strategic force modernization, now join those who support both.